

American

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President Obama, Australia's Gillard Discuss Afghanistan, Trade

Washington — Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard's meetings with President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton focused on shared efforts to transfer the security control of Afghanistan to Afghan forces as well as expanding trade in the Pacific region.

Gillard met with Obama at the White House March 7 and with Clinton at the State Department March 8. She will address a joint session of the U.S. Congress March 9, which the president said is "a high honor that is reserved for only our closest friends, and ... it's a measure of the degree to which Australians are held in such high esteem by Americans."

After their meeting, Obama said he and the Australian premier had discussed the situation in Afghanistan, noting that Australia is the largest non-NATO member of the international coalition, with more than 1,550 Australian service members deployed in the country.

The Australians are making "extraordinary sacrifices in Afghanistan," Obama said, adding that he and Gillard "discussed the fact that 2011 is going to be a year of transition in which we, more and more, provide the assistance necessary for Afghans to take the lead in that effort."

Gillard said she is personally committed to seeing Australia complete its mission in Afghanistan and "ensuring we play our part in training the Afghan National Army and bringing security to Afghanistan so that the Afghan people can lead their own security."

President Obama said the United States and Australia share common interests in "expanding trade in the Pacific region, in promoting clean energy, in making sure that we don't have regulatory barriers that prevent our businesses from working across our borders."

The United States is "very excited about the prospect of joining forces with Australia and other countries to promote growth and employment in the region," he said.

The United States is Australia's fifth-largest merchandise export market and its most important market for services, according to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. It is also Australia's largest import source for services and second-largest import source for merchandise. The United States is also the largest investor in Australia.

Australia is the world's 14th-largest importer of American goods and services. According to the U.S. Commerce

Department's Foreign Trade Statistics, U.S. exports to Australia totaled \$21.803 billion and imports totaled \$8.581 billion in 2010. Those figures represent an increase from 2009, when U.S. exports to Australia totaled \$19.6 billion and imports totaled \$8.011 billion.

President Obama will travel to Indonesia later in 2011 for the East Asia Summit, which the United States will formally join. He will also host the Asia Pacific Economic Council (APEC) forum in Honolulu in November.

"I've talked to President Obama today about preparations for the G20, about its continuing importance in keeping a focus on growth and on jobs for the future," Gillard said.

She added that she is hoping to see "major progress" at APEC, where the Trans-Pacific Partnership will be discussed, as well as at the Doha Round of trade talks that will be discussed at the upcoming summit of the Group of 20 (G20) leading economies in Seoul.

Op-Ed by Secretary Clinton on International Women's Day

The following commentary by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton was distributed on March 7 by the Bloomberg News Wire to mark the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day and is in the public domain. No republication restrictions.

Women's Work-More, Earn-Less Plan Hurts

By Hillary Rodham Clinton

One of the biggest growth markets in the world may surprise you. You've heard about the opportunities opening up in countries like China, regions like Asia and industries like green technology. But one major emerging market hasn't received the attention it deserves: women.

Today, there are more than 200 million women entrepreneurs worldwide. Women earn more than \$10 trillion every year, which is expected to grow by \$5 trillion over the next several years. In many developing countries, women's incomes are growing faster than men's.

Facts such as these should persuade governments and business leaders worldwide to see investing in women as a strategy for job creation and economic growth. Many are doing so. Yet the pool of talented women is underutilized, underpaid and underrepresented in business and society.

Throughout the world, women do two-thirds of the work, yet they earn just one-third of the income and own less than 2 percent of the land. Three billion people don't have access to basic financial services we take for granted, like

bank accounts and lines of credit; the majority of them are women.

Certainly we are seeing the impact of excluding women in the Middle East, where the lack of their access to education and business has hampered economic development and helped lead to social unrest.

If we invest in women's education and give them the opportunity to access credit or start a small business, we add fuel to a powerful engine for progress for women, their families, their communities and their countries. Women invest 80 percent of their incomes on their families and in their communities.

Ripple Effect

When women have equal access to education and health care and the freedom to start businesses, the economic, political and social benefits ripple out far beyond their own home.

At the State Department, we are supporting women worldwide as a critical element of U.S. foreign policy. We are incorporating women's entrepreneurship into our international economic agenda and promoting women's access to markets through the African Growth and Opportunity Act, the Pathways to Prosperity Initiative and women's entrepreneurship conferences.

The U.S. is hosting the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum 2011 to help foster growth and increase opportunities for women throughout the region. We are working with the private sector to provide grants to local non-governmental organizations around the world that are dedicated to women and girls.

Closing the Gap

We are encouraging governments and the private sector to use the tools at their disposal to provide credit, banking and insurance services to more women. Through our mWomen initiative, we will begin to close the gender gap in access to mobile technology, which will improve health care, literacy, education and economic potential.

This is a central focus of my diplomatic outreach. Wherever I go around the world, I meet with governments, international organizations and civic groups to talk about economic policies that will help their countries grow by expanding women's access to jobs and finance.

Many powerful U.S. businesses have embraced this mission as their own. ExxonMobil Corp. is training women entrepreneurs to help them advocate for policies to create more opportunities. Coca-Cola Co. has issued an

ambitious challenge in its "5 by 20" program to empower and train 5 million new women entrepreneurs across the globe by 2020.

Improving Access

Goldman Sachs Group Inc. started the "10,000 Women" initiative to open the door for women who would not otherwise have access to a business education. Ernst & Young is tapping into the productive potential of women with its "Winning Women" program to help female entrepreneurs learn growth strategies from some of the most successful leaders in the U.S. Companies all over the world are committed to increasing productivity, driving economic growth and harnessing the power of emerging markets through greater diversity.

As Robert Zoellick, president of the World Bank said, "gender equality is smart economics."

Governments are passing laws that support women's economic empowerment and building awareness of women's rights. Botswana lifted restrictions on the industries in which women can work, for example. Morocco now allows women to start businesses and get jobs without their husbands' approval. Bolivia began a land titling effort to recognize that women and men have equal rights to own property.

This week, we celebrate the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. It's an occasion for honoring the achievements of women. Without question, the past century has brought astonishing progress, by just about every measure, in women's health, their economic opportunities, their political power and more. Today, women are leaders in every field.

Acting on Ideas

Never in history have there been so many forces working together for gender equity.

But International Women's Day is also an occasion for recognizing how much more needs to be done to support women and girls worldwide. I encourage everyone reading this to reflect on what you and your friends can do to support women -- to put words and ideas into action.

If we decide -- as societies, governments and businesses -- to invest in women and girls, we will strengthen our efforts to fight poverty, drive development and spread stability. When women thrive, families, communities and countries thrive -- and the world becomes more peaceful and prosperous.

Women of Courage Awardees Set Example for the World

By Jane Morse
Staff Writer

Washington — Courage can be contagious, as this year's winners of the International Women of Courage awards have proven.

Ten women have been honored by first lady Michelle Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton for their exceptional courage in advocating for women's rights and empowerment, often at great personal risk.

Since the inception of this award in 2007, the Department of State has honored 38 women from 27 countries. This is the only Department of State award that pays tribute to women activists worldwide.

At an awards presentation at the State Department March 8, the first lady praised the Women of Courage winners for not standing silent in the face of violence, oppression, poverty or inequality.

"Time and again, these women have discovered a very simple truth: that courage can actually be contagious," Obama said to an audience filled with diplomats, members of Congress and business people. The first lady used as an example Yoani Sanchez, a writer in Cuba whose blog "caught fire" on the Internet and was being downloaded onto computer flash drives and passed from person to person. When it was censored by the state, she distributed her blog through what she calls a "citizen network" — people outside of Cuba who helped publish her posts. Her writing is now translated into 15 languages.

In addition to the first lady and the secretary of state, those gathered to honor the awardees included Melanne Vermeer, U.S. ambassador at large for global women's issues, and Julia Gillard, the first woman to become prime minister of Australia.

This year's Women of Courage awardees are:

- Roza Otunbayeva, president of the Kyrgyz Republic.
- Maria Bashir, prosecutor general for Herat province in Afghanistan.
- Nasta Palazhanka, deputy chairwoman for Malady Front (Young Front), a nongovernmental organization in Belarus.
- Henriette Ekwe Ebongo, journalist and publisher of Bebel, a weekly independent newspaper in Cameroon.
- Guo Jianmei, lawyer and director of the Beijing Zhongze Women's Legal Counseling and Service Center in China.
- Yoani Sanchez, innovator, writer and founder of the

Generación Y blog in Cuba.

- Agnes Osztolykan, member of parliament and the Politics Can Be Different Party in Hungary.
- Eva Abu Halaweh, executive director of Mizan Law Group for Human Rights in Jordan.
- Marisela Morales Ibañez, deputy attorney general for special investigations against organized crime in Mexico.
- Ghulam Sughra, founder and chief executive officer of the Marvi Rural Development Organization in Pakistan.

Yoani Sanchez of Cuba and Nasta Palazhanka of Belarus, Clinton noted, were not present because they were prevented by their governments from attending the awards ceremony in the United States.

At the awards ceremony, Clinton repeated U.S. support for women striving for equal opportunity in their societies. She took note of the women of Egypt and Tunisia, who, the secretary said, have just as much right as the men in their countries to remake their governments and make them accountable and transparent to the people. Women should be part of the process for forming such new governments, she said.

Clinton also announced an initiative in partnership with Goldman Sachs Group Inc., a New York-based investment bank, to educate women in the business skills needed to be successful entrepreneurs. Lloyd Blankfein, chairman of Goldman Sachs, explained that the program will be an extension of Goldman Sachs's "10,000 Women" program launched in 2008.

That \$100 million, five-year campaign has trained dozens of women from more than 20 countries. The first women to participate from the State Department extension of the program will be from Haiti and Indonesia.

The Women of Courage awards ceremony fell on March 8, the 100th anniversary of the first International Women's Day. In a commentary released by Bloomberg News Wire for the occasion, Clinton states there are now more than 200 million women entrepreneurs worldwide and that women earn more than \$10 trillion every year, most of which they invest in their families and communities. Even so, women worldwide perform two-thirds of the work but earn just one-third of the income, she said.

The United States is working to close the educational and income gap between women and men, the secretary said. Programs like the mWomen Initiative, which gives women access to mobile technology, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGO), which helps women gain access to markets, and the Pathways to Prosperity Initiative, which helps women develop their business skills and economic opportunities, all fall into that effort.

"This is a central focus of my diplomatic outreach,"

Clinton said. "Wherever I go around the world, I meet with governments, international organizations and civic groups to talk about economic policies that will help their countries grow by expanding women's access to jobs and finance. "If we decide as societies, governments and businesses to invest in women and girls, we will strengthen our efforts to fight poverty, drive development and spread stability."

"When women thrive, families, communities and countries thrive," she said, "and the world becomes more peaceful and prosperous."

Secretary Gates Sees Significant Security Progress in Afghanistan

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates says security gains achieved by Afghan and coalition forces across Afghanistan are significant, but the momentum must be maintained to begin a formal security transition later in 2011.

"The gains we are seeing across the country are significant," Gates said at a March 7 joint press conference in Kabul with President Hamid Karzai. "In the east, Afghan and [International Security Assistance Force] forces are expanding zones of security outward from Kabul and Jalalabad, focusing on blocking insurgent infiltration into population centers along key arteries."

"As a result, commerce has grown and distant provinces are increasingly connected to major marketplaces," Gates said. "I believe we are now positioned to achieve the shared goal of a stable, secure Afghanistan that is no longer a safe haven for terrorists."

A similar situation is happening in southern Afghanistan, Gates said, where Afghan and international troops have forced remnants of the Taliban out of traditional strongholds and a semblance of normal life has begun returning to villages and towns.

"Our forces are linking zones of security in Helmand to Kandahar as we ultimately move toward connecting these areas in the south with those in the east, centered in Kabul," Gates told reporters during a two-day visit.

Because of these successes, Afghanistan is closer to achieving the goal of building national security forces that can take responsibility for their nation's security, Gates said. He expects that Karzai will soon announce the first areas of the country where the formal transition will take place.

"While no decisions on numbers have been made, in my

view, we will be well positioned to begin drawing down some U.S. and coalition forces this July, even as we redeploy others to different areas of the country," he said.

Gates said there will be substantial numbers of coalition forces in Afghanistan for some time. He emphasized that the coalition is not leaving this summer. The Afghan and coalition forces will continue to maintain unrelenting pressure on Taliban insurgents, but will work toward the goal of Afghan forces assuming the lead by the end of 2014, he said.

Karzai told reporters that the state of Afghan security forces' readiness as they are being trained and equipped does not "reduce our responsibility or our determination to provide protection to the Afghan people and protection of our borders."

This trip marks Gates' 13th visit to Afghanistan. He travels on to the Stuttgart, Germany, headquarters of the U.S. Africa Command to attend a change-of-command ceremony March 9 for the arrival of Army General Carter Ham. He will attend a regular meeting of NATO defense ministers in Brussels March 10-11.

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